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Ethnolinguistic Identities and Language Revitalisation in a Small Society

The Case of the Faroe Islands

ABSTRACT This article explores how Faroese managed to be revitalised from a threatened, minority language to become the main language of 45,000 people living on seventeen islands in the North Atlantic. The Faroese language was coupled with a rich oral literature and was spoken in a very narrow and well-defined diglossic context which localised a Faroese linguistic identity. The social space of the homestead was not linguistically infringed upon by the colonial language, Danish, and was left in fact to survive in an environment of thriving spoken traditions. It is argued that these factors and the choice of an orthography quite distinct from the competing variety, enabled the language to survive. Faroese shows us that a tiny language can survive for centuries against the odds, providing certain conditions are in place. It is also evidence of how a low variety in a stable diglossic situation can flourish when the linguistic status quo is dismantled. Faroese has gradually moved into the high variety domain, squeezing Danish out. In theory, the revitalisation of Faroese would appear to be a model of success. Regrettably, the ingredients of language planning success are complex, culture-specific and do not seem to lend themselves to broad reapplication.

KEYWORDS Faroese, revitalisation, diglossia, oral literature, language planning, linguistic identity

Introduction

In discussions of reverse language shift (RLS) or linguistic revitalisation, the case of Faroese has for some reason seldom been the subject of detailed discussion. Other minority languages which have either been revitalised or experienced language shift have been studied, but there have been relatively few attempts to analyse and understand how a tiny speech community under threat in the North Atlantic has maintained linguistic continuity for centuries. One of the reasons for this might be that the explanation of this linguistic survival is not purely a synchronic one, and language planners and sociolinguists have not troubled themselves to delve into the linguistic history of the Faroese.

The Faroe Islands were settled in the early part of the ninth century by Norsemen from principally south-west Norway, but possibly also from the British Isles. As with Iceland, it is conceivable that there was a small population of Irish monks (*papar*) living there at this point, but that with the arrival of the heathen Norsemen they chose to leave. Irrespective of this, there appears to have been direct or indirect contact with the Celts as there are a number of Celtic loanwords, place-names and personal names in Faroese. It appears that the language remained closely tied to the dialects of western Norway in this early period: there would have been trade with Bergen, which was the regional power centre at this time. However, Nauerby (1996: 28–69) discusses how the Faroe Islands became subsequently increasingly isolated and how the language grew apart from the West Norwegian dialects.

Unlike Iceland, we know very little about this early period of Faroese history because there are very few written texts from the medieval period. Our principal Old Faroese text dates from 1298, the *Seyðabrévið* ('Sheep Letter'), and is a statute concerning sheep breeding on the Faroe Islands and acted effectively as the constitution. In 1380 the Faroe Islands became part of Denmark and certainly from the Reformation onwards, the great majority of documents were written in Danish. Prior to the end of the eighteenth century when the language was written down in its present orthography, Faroese had therefore almost no written linguistic history of its own.

Danish had considerable influence on the spoken language too. The first linguists to describe the status of Faroese at the end of the eighteenth century speak of a language that is so "corrupted" by the influence of Danish that every other word is Danish. Svabo (1746–1824), who was the first person to write extensively in post-Reformation Faroese, documenting ballads and compiling the first Faroese dictionary, thought that the Faroese should in fact abandon their language. The death of the language looked imminent.

Grundtvig, Bloch, Hammershaimb, Lyngbye and others collected Faroese ballads in the first half of the nineteenth century and Schrøter produced the first Faroese translation of St. Matthew's gospel in 1823. This was very badly received, as the Faroese were of the opinion that the Faroese language was not suitable at all for religious matters. As Nauerby (1996) notes, when Hammershaimb read from the Gospels in Faroese during a service on New Year's Eve in 1855, the Faroese were so horrified that no further attempt was made. To speak of religious matters using the Faroese language would have been sacrilegious at the time. Since the time of the Reformation, Danish had become the language of the Church and Faroese was considered suitable only for use at home, as is discussed further in the next section.

Prior to Faroese being written down in its present-day orthography, it was considered a dialect or series of dialects. The status of Faroese came to the fore at the time of the Education Bill in 1844 when an attempt was made to organise a schooling system in the Faroe Islands. The overriding sentiment at the time seems to have been that a language could not be considered a national language and thus taught to children unless it had some history of a written tradition. And, if the language was not written in its own orthography, it was considered only a dialect. The written tradition developed quickly and in the context of rising separatism (à propos Denmark), it was decided to forge a link between nationalism and linguistic maintenance. The linguistic revival had begun.

Writers such as Jóannes Patursson (1866–1946) were instrumental in forging this link between national identity and language, which had become a theme across Europe. In this regard, the Faroese were constantly reminded of what had happened on Shetland where the Norse dialect (Norn) died out in the sixteenth century, giving way to English. The Faroese were very keen for their language not to share the same fate, and still seem preoccupied by this today. Many Faroese feel a special bond with the Shetlanders: in terms of geography, they are their closest neighbours and there is a strong cultural link between the islands. However, the Faroese felt that the Shetlanders had lost part of their Norse identity when they lost their own language. Ironically, the loss of the Norn language in Shetland does not seem, however, to have weakened what seems to be a strong and distinct Shetlandic identity, suggesting perhaps that islandhood and relative isolation might be important ingredients of identity, and arguably more significant than language itself.

The first Faroese national newspaper, *Dimmalætting*, was founded in 1878 and a number of articles appeared throughout the next decade claiming that if the Faroese were to lose their language, then they would lose

their nation. Public concern grew until there was a meeting of parliament at the Tinghús on 26 December 1888 to discuss ways to defend the Faroese language and Faroese customs. This became a critical turning point: it was decided at the so-called “Christmas meeting” that clergy would be allowed to preach in Faroese, and thus the diglossia which had been in place for centuries was formally breached. There was an explicit call for action and ethnolinguistic consciousness was to become a component of nationalism. By entrusting Faroese with culturally sensitive functions such as acting as the language of the Church, the language planners had to convince the people that Faroese was no “worse” than Danish.

It is worth considering the dynamics of this speech community in the North Atlantic at the time of this reform. The first census was in 1769 when the population of the Faroe Islands was 4,773. It is thought in fact that the population was between four and five thousand for centuries; the population only began to grow considerably from 1800 onwards as the Faroe Islands switched from a farming to a fishing community. As with some of the languages of Australia, Faroese is evidence that languages with few speakers can support quite considerable dialect variation. There is a good history of dialectal variation in the Faroe Islands with anecdotal evidence of dialectal distinctions already being made in the seventeenth century. As Sandøy (1994: 38–52) has shown, there is good reason to believe that the settlement pattern of the Faroe Islands led to the emergence of dialect distinctions early on.

Although the schooling system and the building of underwater tunnels between many of the islands is likely to lead to some dialect levelling, dialectal (and in particular sub-dialectal) variation remains today. There is a very clear distinction between the dialect of the North and the South where the isogloss runs along the Skopunarfjørður, but there are also dialectal features particular to the islands of Vágur in the west, Sandoy and Suðuroy in the south. In addition to this, there is dialectal variation to be found on these islands themselves: sub-dialectal variation on Suðuroy is said to be particularly rich. Höskuldur Þráinsson *et al.* (2004: 339–367) have documented the history of much of the dialectal variation in Faroese and it will not be repeated here.

Suffice it to say that the most salient dialect distinction is to be found between the dialects of the North and the South and this could be summarised in terms of the phonology as: northern Streymoy, Eysturoy and Norðoyar have [oi] pronunciation for /ei/ whereas the rest of the islands have [ai]; /a/ is pronounced as an open front unrounded vowel before /ng, nk/ in the southern variety and as an open-mid front unrounded vowel in the northern dialects; and there are rather clear dialectal differences with

respect to the phonetic quality of /p, t, k/ after long vowels. Thus, /p, t, k/ are typically pre-aspirated after long vowels north of southern Streymoy, and also in Vágar, except after the high [i] or [u] or diphthongs that end in these elements. Post-aspiration of /p, t, k/ after long vowels only occurs sporadically, for example in Tórshavn (where /p, t, k/ are typically not pre-aspirated after long vowels).

Dialectal identities are strong and are especially important in indexing an identity on the more remote islands, where sub-dialectal variation is at its richest, but where also dialectal variation is at times syntactic and lexical, and not just phonological. There is considerable awareness regarding dialectal variation and the fieldworker is typically told on the islands of Sandoy and Suðuroy in particular, that dialects vary quite considerably from village to village. A comprehensive socio-linguistic analysis of these dialects has not yet been completed, but one suspects that the Faroese are prone to exaggerate dialectal differences. If so, this is noteworthy and is once again the inverse of the ethnolinguistic situation in Iceland, where the notion of sociolinguistic homogeneity (and thus in the eyes of the Icelanders, socio-economic homogeneity or an even distribution of wealth) has a distinct appeal. There was no appeal to a homogenising discourse in the Faroe Islands or bias towards an abstract, idealised spoken language, but instead the overriding impression is one of a complex, pluricentric Faroe Islands. Once a standardised written language had been established, multiple dialect identities did not undermine the linguistic revival movement or the struggle for political autonomy.

On the island of Suðuroy, which lies quite some way south of the other islands, there is clearly an appeal to a separate linguistic (and social) identity. The identity of the Suðuroy inhabitants is ostensibly different from that of the other more religious, church-going Faroese, and language or dialect is to some extent the basis of this different identity. A number of the islanders identified more closely with the Northern Isles and mainland Scandinavia than the Faroe Islands.

It is not clear if this variation and the awareness of it played any role in the survival of the language. The argument put forward in this paper is instead that the Faroese language survived against the odds for centuries because of its atypical relationship with the superstrate, Danish, and because of the long and important tradition of the oral literature in the Faroe Islands. At first glance, it seems that Faroese had reached the point on the language death continuum whereby the chances of the language being saved were very minimal indeed. And yet, the language survived and through the course of the twentieth century came to become fully revitalised. The question is therefore to determine what the relevant factors were

and whether anything can be learnt for modelling the revitalisation of some of the thousands of endangered languages of the world.

Linguistic Maintenance and Ethnolinguistic Identities

The linguistic situation in the Faroe Islands was described previously as diglossic and it is important to understand that the two varieties were used in very different domains and that this distinction was probably respected. Danish was the written language used in public, in Church, Government and schools, whereas Faroese was the spoken vernacular used in private at home: Danish was the *kultursprog* ('language of culture') and Faroese was the *mundart* ('vernacular'). As we have seen, the functions of the high and low varieties were socially determined: the use of the low variety in circumstances for which the high variety alone is socially prescribed was not generally tolerated. We can be sure that this distinction was clear-cut because when Schrøter, the minister in Suðuroy, wrote to the Danish Bible Society in 1815 offering to translate the Bible into Faroese, he points out that Faroese children have a hard time understanding the Danish textbooks that they are supposed to use at home, as they "neither hear nor speak a word of Danish at home" (Höskuldur Práinsson *et al.* 2004: 378). The Faroese exposure to Danish was limited to specific domains: the Danish language on the Faroe Islands was learned through the Bible, so that when people in the *bygdir* ('settlements') tried to make themselves understood in Danish, it would sound as if they were reciting from the Old Testament. In the case of Faroese, it should be borne in mind that the speech community was not only diglossic, but that this high variety was shared by all, irrespective of dialect differences. This high variety with its written language and written literature may have been a prestigious form, particularly as "prestige" may have been something that was religiously defined in this pious community.

In a diglossic scenario, Faroese as the low variety was rooted in a very narrow and well-defined context where the language was not threatened. In such an environment, diglossia situations may endure for considerable stretches of time without any serious encroachment of one of the languages upon the domains of the other. The social space of the homestead was not linguistically infringed upon by the colonial language, Danish, and was left in fact to flourish in an environment of a thriving oral literature. Such a functional complementation of two linguistic systems tends to be characterised by stability. The Faroese identity was inextricably linked to this oral literature, which packaged together all the indigenous narratives and collective memories of Faroese rural life, particularly in regions away from

the capital. These were stories of belonging and identification. Ironically perhaps (but not unexpected), it is at this time when these rhymes were first written down and when the Faroese culture evolved from a spoken to a written form that the tradition of telling stories appears to have begun to wane. As previously mentioned, Faroese was not written down until the nineteenth century and this must have added to the value of the Faroese oral heritage, as there was no Faroese written norm to diminish the significance of the spoken language or to compete with it.

The Faroe Islands is well known for its ballads, which were an important part of traditional Faroese life up until quite recently. Today, ballads continue to be performed, but normally in a more organised and institutional manner than previously. There exists a rich heritage of *kvæði* (heroic ballads), *visur* (folk ballads, poems and melodies used for dance), legends, fairy tales, riddles, proverbs and indigenous *tættir*, which are satirical ballads, often written about a particular situation, but which may also concern something very personal. Such ethnic songs, rhymes, counting melodies and lullabies were a particularly important component of Faroese oral literature, as the recital of such rhymes lied at the heart of cultural practice.

For centuries these rhymes have been recited to children of different ages at their homes and on the farms. Such rhymes would typically have been told to children after a hard day's work on the farm when small groups would gather in a household to hear music and stories to pass away the long dark winter evenings. The setting for these rhymes is called *kvöldsetur* ('evening sittings') in Faroese and it provides us with a clear image of traditional rural Faroese life where cultural transmission was based on story telling and music. People would gather in somebody's home (often the kitchen) after a hard day working in the fields, knit, sew and hear stories and rhymes. The *kvöldsetur* were the locus of cultural life where a sense of community was established, founded on the exchange of oral literature. *Kvöldsetur* were thus "a primary institution of remembrance and remained an established feature of Faroese life until the late nineteenth century when economic change rendered them obsolete" (Wylie 1987: 41).

Although there were multiple dialectal identities, there was one cultural norm based on oral literature that tied this speech community together through periods of relative isolation and colonial suppression, albeit one would not want to over-emphasise the latter point. The low variety was therefore very firmly anchored to this permanent and irrevocable milieu—the homestead/farmstead where the oral tradition was transmitted in Faroese exclusively (or almost exclusively). In this manner, the vernacular was coupled with the centuries old rural Faroese identity and traditional way of life. Diglossia appears actually to have aided the language preserva-

tion process because it ensured that the two competing linguistic norms were always contextually separate. Diglossia provided Faroese with a restricted, but locally embedded authentic linguistic identity. Indeed, when one of the varieties was used in the wrong social setting, it was considered absurd as we have seen with the example of early attempts to introduce Faroese as the language of the Church.

With the linguistic revival, the diglossia that had been in place for centuries was dismantled and the Faroese language was invited to compete with its larger neighbour. Faroese went thus from a situation of bilingualism with diglossia (from probably the Reformation onwards) to bilingualism without diglossia. According to Fishman's (2000: 81–89) model where the dichotomies of the written/spoken, bilingual/monolingual, diglossic/non-diglossic are plotted, bilingualism without diglossia is considered an inevitable phase in the transition to monolingualism. Indeed, one could argue that in the case of the Faroe Islands where English is beginning to supplant Danish as the second language, Faroese is moving towards a situation where there is neither bilingualism nor diglossia. A monolingual Faroese speech community would have been surely unthinkable a hundred years ago.

At the time of the linguistic turn, a new orthography was introduced and this enabled Faroese to begin to occupy the high variety territory because it gave some validation to Faroese culture. A written norm can act to foster diglossia, but in this instance the introduction of a written norm was a catalyst in its removal. Faroese was now to create a *kulturmál* ('language of culture') and the ideology that was rapidly gaining ground was that of coupling separatism with linguistic distinctiveness. The emerging positive ethnolinguistic consciousness subsumed an imperative for social action on behalf of the vernacular. It should be highlighted that there was no real linguistic conflict or opposition in the Faroe Islands, as one might expect. Encouraging this positive ethnolinguistic consciousness did not lead to a monolingual monopolisation of the community's communicative repertoire. Faroese had fully accepted Danish as the high variety, but to justify its separateness it had to present itself as linguistically different from Danish. It was, however, the spoken traditions that lent the Faroese an ideology for articulating their cultural differences.

An important issue for this Faroese cultural linguistic or ethnolinguistic identity in recent years has been the issue of naming and renaming due to political change and name laws. Previously, the Faroese had a system of patronymics as still exists in Iceland today. This was banned by the Danes in 1828 in favour of the non-patronymic system used in the rest of Scandinavia. After much discussion and controversy, a Faroese name law was introduced in 1992, reallowing patronyms, and it seems that quite a number

of people actually changed what were at the time their surnames following the introduction of this legislation. Once again, this looks like a subtle shift to what could be called an insular Scandinavian identity. Personal names are highly salient identity markers and the Icelandic naming system is so distinctive and also so un-Danish.

Revitalisation and Orthography

Choosing the written norm was one of the most important events in the linguistic history of Faroese whose significance to the revitalisation of Faroese has perhaps been underestimated. Höskuldur Práinsson *et al.* (2004: 374–392) have provided the full history of the sequence of events and it need not be reproduced here. For the purpose of this article, the relevant points are that those who recorded the oral literature all tried to establish their own standards. Svabo, Schrøter and Jóannes í Króki all used their own orthographies based on their respective dialects, and thus provided useful information on dialect variation of the time. A number of these different norms appear to have been in use for some years, but it was decided that for Faroese to serve as a national language it was imperative to decide on one orthography.

The choice came down to three very different proposed standards for the written language: Svabo's orthography which was largely phonetic, very consistent and based on his own dialect of Faroese, that of Vágar, giving us a good indication of the pronunciation of this west Faroese dialect in the late eighteenth century; Jakobsen's (1864–1918) very phonetically-based written norm (Jakobsen was influenced by the British phonetician Henry Sweet) which aimed at a one-to-one correspondence between speech sounds and letters and was not dissimilar to Svabo's proposal; and finally Hammershaimb's (1819–1909) historically based, supra-local, morphophonemic, etymological orthography (i.e. spelling based on Old Norse).

The latter is of course very much reminiscent of the philosophy behind Ivar Aasen's Nynorsk which became a new written standard in nineteenth century Norway. This new standard was arguably archaic, but was at heart an abstract, proto-Norwegian based on a number of West Norwegian dialects which Aasen knew well and had studied in depth. Faroese and Nynorsk are both unusual in that they are dialect-based superstructures established in a similar period and context, but which were not the languages of the respective elites at the time. Nynorsk, as a new written standard, was based on the idea that the dialects of western Norway shared a common structure, which made them their own language or variety in their own right. One might argue that the consequences of the establishment of these two

norms were, however, quite different: the Faroese written standard might have helped unite speakers of different Faroese dialects, whereas the creation of a second written language in Norway became ultimately divisive.

Hammershaimb overcame the difficulty of knowing which Faroese dialect to base the orthography on by developing a dialect-independent standard that took the language back to the old language, and hence followed the Icelandic model. The etymological spelling solved the problem of dialect differences by concealing them in a common, non-phonetic “starred” form (e.g. variation in the diphthongisation of the vowel *ew/ow* is concealed by the spelling *ó*, corresponding to Icelandic). The ideology was to create a norm that was maximally different from Danish (but also the Faroese dialects which are often quite distinct from the written norm) in order that one could counter the Danish accusations that Faroese was merely a dialect. We know that in the late eighteenth century the Faroese dialects were regarded as “Norwegian,” with no autonomy of their own. Without a national language, separatist calls and the independence movement would have been groundless. The result was a very unphonetic, archaic looking orthographic superstructure that sits above the dialects, incorporating even phonemes that exist in Icelandic but that are not pronounced in Faroese.

The dominant philosophy seems to have been that the Faroese needed to go back to the old language, the ancient norm, in the way that the Icelanders had done. The motivation for this in Iceland was the medieval manuscripts which are sacred there and underpin the Icelandic identity: language is conceived as the living link to the rich corpus of medieval literature written in Iceland. In the Faroe Islands, almost no medieval manuscripts exist, however. The Faroese were told that they were going back to the old Faroese language in accepting this written norm, but we are left to conjecture what this norm might have been. Hammershaimb rooted the orthography in the past, giving the language an historical perspective and also the sense that the Faroese belonged to an ancient linguistic tradition whose maintenance was desirable. Using artificial means, he appeared to have been attempting to enhance the dignity of the language.

Faroese already enjoyed phonological distinctiveness, and the lack of a normalised written tradition meant that it was now possible to tailor an orthographic distinctiveness too. Linguistically, it had become part of an insular Scandinavian identity with Iceland and thus the Faroese began to distance themselves from the mainland Scandinavian identity. The etymological, unphonetic orthography was, however, not without its problems. The Faroese had to effectively learn to read their own language due to the distance between the written norm and the various dialects, and this obviously made the teaching of the written language to children more problematic.

The issue of which norm to use was widely discussed and eventually it was agreed upon to adopt a compromise—the so-called *broyting* ('change'). Although this norm was meant to be a compromise between Jakobsen's and Hammershaimb's proposals, it was in fact much closer to the latter. The Icelandicised orthography was the one that was eventually chosen to represent Faroese, and it is worth exploring what the reasons were behind this. There was a political factor involved here: Jón Sigurðsson, the leader of the Icelandic independence movement in the nineteenth century, wanted to found with Hammershaimb and others the Faroese Society in Copenhagen. Jón Sigurðsson had already produced an Icelandicised version of *Færeyinga saga* which was perhaps read by the Icelandic and Faroese intellectuals, many of whom were living in Denmark.

Indeed, once the process of linguistic revival was underway and linguistic purism became a tool for the separatist movement, the influence of the intellectuals based in Copenhagen was such that a number of the neologisms introduced into the language to replace Danish terms were actually coined in Copenhagen. It would be no exaggeration to say that linguistic policy was being steered by a group of people who were heavily influenced by the events unfolding in Iceland and who did not even live in the Faroe Islands. The Icelandic influence was fully reflected in the linguistic reform. As Fishman (1997: 3) notes, the vernacular frequently plays a major role in nationalist movements, both as a medium for mobilisation and as a desideratum. In the case of the Faroe Islands, it had a symbolic role in representing an ethnocultural aggregate: the vernacular was the language of the traditional, oral literature in which the Faroese identity was established.

The primary reason for codifying this norm over the other two suggested orthographies was, however, surely a question of the appeal of linguistic distinctiveness. It was deemed necessary to form a nexus among language, ethnicity and nationhood. In the instance of the Faroe Islands, one could argue that this ethnolinguistic ideology had become the deep structure of overt language practices. Hammershaimb's norm made Faroese look like a distinct language, or at least distinct from any mainland Scandinavian language. With a written norm that looked sufficiently different from Faroese, the task was now to create a literature that used this norm. It seems as if the rich oral heritage was not worthy as a body of literature to hinge a separate national identity on. By using an etymological orthography and making Faroese look like an ancient language, outsiders could perhaps be deceived in thinking that the written culture itself was an ancient one. Although Faroese was never a minority language as such, there is little doubt that the establishment of this specific written norm helped to secure the future of Faroese.

There is of course the important question of why the Faroese chose to

expand their “corrupted” language and make it a national norm when it would have been surely easier to simply accept Danish. As has been previously implied, the answer to this question lies in the ideology of coupling nationalism with the pride of speaking a distinct “national” language. But one wonders if it were also a question of whether adopting a colonial language would have diminished the sense of belonging to a place. In this regard, one can invoke the notion of “ethnolinguistic vitality” which is defined as “that which makes a group likely to behave as a distinctive and active collective entity in inter-group situations” (Giles, Bourhis & Taylor (eds.) 1977: 306). This is a psychological measure of the degree to which one defines oneself relative to where one comes from. All the evidence would indicate a high degree of ethnolinguistic vitality in the Faroe Islands in modern times at least, and perhaps previously. Ethnolinguistic vitality is probably enhanced in very small, homogenous island populations because the parameters for “belonging” are so clearly defined. Wylie & Margolin (1981: 13–45) has shown how the use of spatial referencing in Faroese—toponyms, adverbs of place, spatial referring through persons—creates this discourse of identity construction.

With such dialectal variation and dialect identities, this sense of belonging may be, however, more of a local one than a national one. This sense of belonging to a location has a historical dimension (Mæhlum 2002: 77), and the historical continuity of “places” is something that the Faroese like to emphasize. Place-names (or rather very local topographic references) are often used as personal names in the Faroe Islands. This means that people’s personal names act as group or lineage identifiers, particularly if one family has lived in the same house for generations, which often seems to be the case. As Gaffin (1996: 97) notes, “family becomes almost interchangeable or synonymous with place,” and this is particularly the case with the large number of nicknames that the Faroese employ. The central insight with ethnolinguistic vitality is that when a variety’s vitality (in this case Faroese) is said to be “high,” we can predict social changes in favour of that variety, and most obviously a shift towards wider use of it.

Linguistic Purism and Recent Linguistic Development in Faroese

There was a shift to the vernacular variety and at the same time an urge to employ a “pure” language. As we have seen, linguistic purism was implicit in the codification process: the choice of orthography alone was determined by puristic considerations. Linguistic purism has thus been part of the Faroese linguistic culture since the time that texts were written down in this post-

Reformation norm and continued to be the motivation behind twentieth century language policy. In compiling the first word lists of Faroese, Svabo (1970: XIII) complains that the lexicon is not “pure” enough. As with linguistic purism in Iceland, the focus became the lexicon and Jakobsen began the process of introducing Faroese words to replace Danish ones. It was not, however, simply a question of lexical replacement but also one of nurturing positive ethnolinguistic attitudes. As Jógvan í Lón Jacobsen (2004: 71–106) informs us, many of the words that were considered “Faroese” were not used as they were stigmatised or carried negative connotations.

The Faroese have managed to engineer a complete reversal in terms of linguistic perceptions in a fashion not dissimilar to what has happened in Welsh in the last twenty years or so. As far as I am aware, the issue of how Faroese came to perceive their language so positively has not been fully addressed. As once again has happened in Wales, it is likely that such positive linguistic perceptions and a positive ethnolinguistic consciousness fed off the sense of gaining some political autonomy, independence and nationhood. In the cases of Iceland, Wales and the Faroe Islands, it would appear that language had to become a political tool to ensure successful revitalisation.

As the twentieth century progressed, the use of Faroese moved steadily into the domains previously occupied by Danish. Faroese has been used in schools since 1938, and has been an official language since 1948 when the Faroese declared Home Rule. Although Faroese became the language of education some time ago, it is only now that many of the textbooks are actually published in Faroese. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Faroese became increasingly accepted as the language of the Church, but once again the Danish Bible was used in the Faroe Islands until 1961 when it was finally translated into Faroese in its entirety. The logistics of ensuring that all pedagogic material is published in Faroese is obviously taxing for such a tiny population. Similarly, the Faroese do not have the resources to produce many television programmes of their own.

Radio seems to have played quite an important role in the more recent stage of norm development. When in 1957 the Faroese radio was introduced, every household received a radio set. Up until this point, people had been listening to Norwegian radio programmes, but now for the first time there was an opportunity to listen to the radio in their own language. The radio acted as a vehicle for formalising a communal linguistic identity that had existed for centuries, and might even have contributed to a sense of linguistic solidarity. It also acted as a platform for linguistic debate: one of the most successful radio programmes in the Faroe Islands was *Orðabókin* (“The Dictionary”). This language programme presented by the well-known linguist Jóhan Hendrik Poulsen, who subsequently assumed the nickname,

Orðabókin, ran for 25 years and it discussed language use, neologisms and in particular Faroese etymologies. At times, this was bordering on language planning as a very bottom-up, collective effort. Although a Language Committee was subsequently established (see below), it was not authoritarian, top-down, prescriptive language planning à l'Académie française.

To feed into this radio programme, people would write in from all over the Faroe Islands with ideas for the origins of obscure words and phrases. Together it acts as a bank of linguistic knowledge, but also of folk linguistic perceptions. The enormous popularity of this programme is a record of the deep-rooted interest in language in the Faroe Islands. It brought different dialect communities together across seventeen islands, and thus the inevitable question arose of what norm or standard should be used when speaking on the radio. Through the radio there was initially an attempt at forming a spoken standard, but this was publicly dropped and it was announced that the policy was that everybody on the radio should be able to speak in his or her own dialect. In this classless society, there seem to be few salient values attached to different speech types. It remains therefore problematic today to talk about a standard Faroese language. Unlike schizoglossic Iceland where there is little tolerance of dialect variation, variation is very much welcomed and this seems to stand in the way of creating a supra-local form for the spoken language at least.

It was Jóhan Hendrik Poulsen who established the Føroyska málnevndin ('Language Committee') in 1985—a Language Committee that was once again based on the Icelandic model. The aim of the Committee was principally lexical innovation, with the explicit intention of introducing Faroese words to replace existing Danish words, or incoming Danish and English words. My own (unpublished) language attitudes research in 2009 showed that the Faroese are on the whole very supportive of language policy. A number of my informants said that they liked the semantic transparency of the neologisms and that this made the whole process of word creation rather fun. The dynamics of lexical innovation are intriguing as there are many instances of words being introduced in such an informal and unorganised manner. The Faroese seem themselves surprised by this and take great pleasure in reciting to an "outsider" anecdotes of how words enter the language. The Head of the Language Committee told me that one day a group of girls knocked on his door saying that they were going to Iceland to play volleyball and that they were disappointed that there was no Faroese word for 'volleyball'. Johann Hendrik or the "Dictionary" as he is called came up with the word *flogbólur* ('flying ball'). The girls went to Iceland and announced that they were the *flogbólur* team from the Faroe Islands and the word for volleyball in Faroese is to this day still *flogbólur*. Of course, lexical

innovation along these lines can only work in such a fashion in a tiny speech community. Most of the neologisms are based on Icelandic coinages or are Icelandic/Danish calques with the spelling adapted to Faroese.

The Faroese informants in their forties and older have witnessed quite a lot of lexical replacement. A number of my informants had gone through a process of lexical shift, switching to the new Faroese words that their children had been told to use at school. The outcome is that (unusually for speech communities), a number of Faroese believe that children speak better Faroese than their parents. What they mean by this is that younger people use more Faroese words. It is the ultimate coup for the language policy makers: people have subscribed to the ideology that the “best” Faroese is that which uses the most Faroese words, but also that these words are good because they represent the old language even though many of them are direct loans from Icelandic.

The notion of “best” Faroese is largely a lexical one, unlike in Iceland where the idea of “best” Icelandic is also partly syntactic. In terms of syntax, it is worth noting that Icelandic once again serves as the ideal point of reference for the purists. Faroese has partially lost the genitive, but there have been attempts to reintroduce it. This was done by listing genitive forms in the nominal paradigms in school textbooks even though they were no longer used in the spoken language. The result has been that there is a distinction drawn between the spoken and written language when it comes to usage of the genitive. It is also true that new and innovative forms of the genitive using the *-sa* suffix have appeared.

There has been some criticism of the policy of lexical purism since about the 1960s, and there have even been popular attempts to do away with the Language Committee entirely. In the 1960s and 1970s a number of prescriptive, purist (and ultra purist) dictionaries were written. These dictionaries tried to avoid so-called *an-be-for-heit-ilsí* words (words containing foreign prefixes and suffixes). These words comprise about one per cent of the entries in the puristic dictionaries which provides us with an insight in to the editorial policies of these dictionaries. The dictionaries that have been written from 1990 onwards tend to be more forgiving of Danish words and a balance has been struck. The issue of dictionaries is controversial in the Faroe Islands, as it is widely acknowledged that they do not represent actual usage, but instead an idealised speech (something called “Academy Faroese”). They point to a clear dichotomy between the spoken and the written language: Danish loan-words are referred to as “spoken language” while the Icelandic loans are noted as being literary in the dictionary. The use of prescriptive norms in dictionaries had the opposite effect and created a purism-backlash, but this problem has to some extent been addressed

now. Although the Faroese have been compiling word lists since the late eighteenth century, the first Faroese-Danish dictionary was written in 1928 and the first Faroese-Faroese dictionary was only written in 1998.

Other opponents to Faroese linguistic purism would question the logic or even the ideology behind replacing Danish loans with Icelandic loan-words. Some may object to what they perceive to be an “aggressive” means of implementing language policy: this is a place where since 1990 the Faroese dairy company provides milk cartons with advice and guidance to consumers on correct language use. This is complemented sometimes by a cartoon with a child being force-fed cereal in the shape of the letter ð—the letter that is hardest to swallow.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the revitalisation of Faroese would appear to be a model of success which language planners should aim to reproduce and recreate elsewhere. Regrettably, the ingredients of language planning success are very complex, culture-specific and do not seem to lend themselves to broad reapplication. My argument has been that the successful revitalisation of Faroese can be explained by the following factors: Faroese was left to flourish as the low variety in a rigorous diglossia; the domain where this variety was spoken was home to a rich and culture defining oral literature, and the RLS process was initiated by choosing an orthography distinct from the competing variety and using this as a political tool in the nationalist movement. Language revitalisation can be achieved by other means, but these are the salient points to Faroese and it would require an act of serendipity for this particular combination of factors to be found elsewhere in a similar context.

It is also significant that Faroese never got to the point where the language became dysfunctional and obsolete. What is more, reverse language shift must have been considered desirable, and one suspects that this might have been aided by the very definite relationship between language and culture. This coupling might have been fostered by the situation of diglossia because it localised the Faroese linguistic identity and tied it to a very narrow context. Unambiguous beliefs about the relationship between language and culture were part of the Faroese culture itself and would have been culturally transmitted from one generation to the next.

Unusually, the outcome of this dismantled stable diglossia where the high and low varieties were functionally differentiated, was that speakers shifted to the low, non-prestige variety and not vice versa. This goes against Fishman's (1967: 29–38) understanding of diglossia where the low variety

loses ground to the superposed high variety. Instead, this would appear to support Ferguson's (1959) model, which predicts that the low variety takes over the outdated high variety as occurred in Greece, where Katherévusa has been modified to reflect much more closely the vernacular currently in use. However, this is not what has happened in the Faroe Islands: neither Danish nor Faroese has begun to accommodate features from the other language. Faroese has simply gradually moved into the high variety domains, squeezing Danish out.

Using Fishman's model, this bilingualism without diglossia is normally indicative of an unstable, transitional situation. This would seem to be the case in the Faroe Islands where bilingualism is also threatened now. Sociolinguistically, Faroese seems to have evolved from stable bilingualism to societal bilingualism, which Fishman (1972: 135–162) describes as a society in which two languages are used but where relatively few individuals are actually bilingual. It is unlikely that Faroese was perfectly diglossic: there was probably some "functional leakage," that is partial overlap of language uses in a diglossic or bilingual situation. There is much in modern life, such as enhanced social mobility, which militates against strict compartmentalisation of high and low varieties.

There have been attempts at forming a standard in Faroese with its codification in dictionaries and grammars, but this norm is not always representative of the language spoken. The chosen Faroese orthography means that the written norm is very different from the vernacular. In the Faroe Islands, the call for reverse language shift was a call for cultural reconstruction and for greater cultural self-regulation. Although the language was revitalised, it was, however, at the expense of the traditional culture. The bond between the indigenous culture and the vernacular was severed. Language planning is ostensibly a modern process that seeks regularity and not the preservation of the sublime. Its objective is not symbolic cultural reinforcement. The oral literature does not lend itself to control and regulation by the authorities, and thus the practice of reciting these rhymes and tales continues to disappear. At the beginning of the twenty-first century the prospects for this tiny speech community itself look, however, to be better than ever before.

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